

NATIONAL PRIVILEGES AND INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY.

A S E R M O N,

PREACHED IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF HELSTONE,

ON FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 1839,

AT THE VISITATION OF THE RIGHT REVEREND HENRY
LORD BISHOP OF EXETER,

BY THE

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COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.*

PUBLISHED BY HIS LORDSHIP'S COMMAND, AND AT THE REQUEST
OF THE CLERGY THEN PRESENT.

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TO THE RIGHT REVEREND
HENRY, LORD BISHOP OF EXETER,
THIS SERMON,
PREACHED AT HIS LORDSHIP'S VISITATION,
AND NOW PUBLISHED IN OBEDIENCE TO HIS COMMAND,
AND AT THE REQUEST OF THE
CLERGY THEN PRESENT,
IS RESPECTFULLY AND AFFECTIONATELY
INSCRIBED.

THE HISTORY OF THE

REIGN OF KING CHARLES THE FIRST

IN THE YEAR 1649

BY JOHN BURNET, BISHOP OF SALTHERS

IN TWO VOLUMES. THE SECOND VOLUME.

LONDON, Printed by J. Streater, at the Sign of the Gun, in St. Dunstons Church-yard, 1694.

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DEUTERONOMY, iv. 8, 9.

“WHAT nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life : but teach them thy sons, and thy sons’ sons.”

THESE words, I need scarcely observe, occur in that stirring exhortation, which Moses was commissioned to deliver to the people of Israel, previously to their going over to possess that land, which the Lord had given them, beyond Jordan. Having pointed out the sad effects of their unbelief, and reminded them of God’s anger, for their numberless acts of disobedience, the prophet proceeds, with the voice of warning, to show them the way, in which they ought to walk, so as to please God ; and so avoid a repetition of His righteous judgments. “ *Now,*” he exclaims, “ *hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes, and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land, which the Lord God of your fathers giveth you.*” Listen to the plain commands of God, and turn not to the right hand, nor to the left ; let His word be your rule, His commandments your guide. “ *Ye shall not add unto the word which I*

command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it: that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God." And then, holding up to them, as a beacon, the punishment of those "*who joined themselves unto Baal Peor**," he reminds them that they themselves were living evidences of the mercy of God, "*unto all that truly turn unto Him:*" and thence proceeds to announce the commission with which he was entrusted, endeavouring, at the same time, to induce them, by warnings of past punishments, and recollections of past mercies, to cleave to that God, who had preserved them from such dangers, and delivered them from such afflictions. "*Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is, in all things that we call upon Him for?"* And then he proceeds, in the words of our text, "*What nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day. Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons and thy sons' sons."*

* Numb. xxv. 3.

Now all Scripture is, we are told, written for our learning; and "is profitable," not only "for correction and reproof," but also "for instruction;" and although Moses, by Divine commission, addressed this exhortation to the Israelites, it was not written for their sake alone, but for us also; and if we examine it carefully, and reflect seriously on the warnings which it contains, it will not, if God vouchsafe His blessing, be a fruitless subject for our present consideration.

May the eternal Spirit pour down, of the abundance of His grace, into our hearts, that we may be enabled truly to understand, and faithfully to apply, the precepts and admonitions now before us, so that we "receive them not in vain!"

Proceed we, then, to consider the inspired language of Moses, not as applicable only to the Israelites, in the days of their wanderings, but to our own country, and to our own age. And here what a wide field is opened to us for reflection, not only upon our national privileges, but also on our individual responsibilities! How many are the blessings we enjoy! How poor the account we can render of our use of them! And we, the Ministers of God, appointed, like Moses, to lead our people through the wilderness of Sin to the safe and heavenly Canaan, may well take up his words; and, pointing to the blessings which we so eminently enjoy beyond less favoured nations, declare the danger which we shall incur, and the destruction we shall bring upon ourselves, if we fall away from the faith, and forget the covenant of the Lord our God. Well

may we re-echo the exhortations of Moses, and bid the people "*hearken unto the statutes and the judgments which the Lord our God hath given us to walk by, that we may live, and go in and possess*" that heavenly inheritance, which was purchased for us, and prepared by the sacrifice of our blessed Saviour. And how are these statutes to be kept? Listen again to the words of inspiration, and may God grant that the warning voice be not sounded in vain! "*Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God.*" Will any presume to maintain that this injunction refers not to ourselves? Shall it be said that the Israelites were bound to keep so strictly, and obey so implicitly those laws, and observe those ordinances, which were "only a shadow of the good things to come;" and that we, to whom it has been given to witness the full noon-tide blaze of that Sun of Righteousness, of whose rising they had only a dim promise, may be careless or negligent of those great truths, *every one* of which was revealed to us by God himself, to be the rule of our life, and the light of our paths? Can we satisfy ourselves with a portion only of that divine system of religion, which pervades the whole Bible, every word of which, we are assured, was written for our good, and with a view to our salvation, and which, if neglected, or thrown aside as valueless, will one day flash upon our conscience, like the hand-writing on the wall, and make us feel the dreadful consequences of such a wilful and profane disregard of those

treasures of divine wisdom, which God, in his mercy, has vouchsafed to fallen man? If Moses was enjoined to enforce a compliance with *all* the commands of the Lord, and to impress upon the people that the law was to be preserved and obeyed in all its integrity, surely the same injunction still remains in full force on us. We too must retain faithfully, and obey implicitly, *all* those holy doctrines, which, beautiful as they are in themselves, still derive (so to speak) additional beauty, and additional authority, from their consistent unity and harmonious completeness: and if we could ever be so debased and so ungrateful, as to undervalue the precious gifts of revelation; or become for one moment insensible to the privilege of being permitted freely to enjoy (yes, reverend brethren, and freely to dispense) the pure, unmutilated word of God; the awful denunciation of that very word would soon, we trust, recall us from our perilous course, and show us what a fearful thing it is to despise, or to neglect, any of the commandments of the Lord our God. “For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this Book, if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the Book of Life*.”

It is one of the most beautiful characteristics of our Established Church, that while she affords to her members distinct and palpable marks to point out the limits of her fold, she allows to all a full and free

* Rev. xxii. 18, 19.

examination of her doctrines and her principles. She compels none to enter—she grieves over them, but she forces none to remain, who are tempted to stray from her bosom. She invites inquiry.—With the Bible in her hand, she points to her bulwarks, and describes her walls—lays bare the solid foundation on which she stands,—a rock, sure and steadfast, even the foundation of the apostles and prophets, on which the building “fitly framed together,” with Jesus Christ himself as the chief corner-stone, stands erect amid the storms, and defies the noisy turbulence of merely human strife. For if that word be true which, by the merciful providence of God, hath so long been preserved to us, unchanged and un mutilated amid the crash of empires and the lapse of ages—that holy word, secured to us by the blood of our martyred forefathers, and handed down by them to us as a sacred legacy, more costly than gold, yea, much more to be desired than pure gold : if that word be true, then must the religion which we profess be true also, for it is grounded on the immutable truth of Him who cannot lie—it was taught us by our Saviour’s life, and confirmed by His death—it was sanctioned and approved by the practice of the apostles and the early fathers, and so long as we continue true to ourselves, to our profession, and to our God, the very gates of hell shall not prevail against us. True we may be exposed to losses, trials, and alarms—we may be ridiculed as bigots, and scoffed at as fools—we may be denounced, on the one hand, as heretics, and held up to scorn and derision, on the other, as exclusives,

seeking only our worldly gain—we may, as indeed it was foretold, “suffer persecutions,” but it will be “for the cross of Christ.” The protection of the State may be withdrawn, and our earthly possessions may be roughly snatched away from us: but still shall we remain a Church—still a true branch of the Church of Christ, which He purchased with his blood—still shall we, her Ministers, retain the same authority and be subject to the same responsibilities as now: submitting ourselves to those who are over us in the Lord, whether in Church or State—we shall still protest boldly against the superstitions and corruptions of Rome, on the one hand, no less than against the undefined and uncontrolled eccentricities of dissent on the other.

“*Keep therefore and do*” the commandments which God has given, “*for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.*” And if this were the security of the Israelites, it is no less ours also. Highly as we rank among the nations of the earth, and varied and extensive as are our resources, unless the Lord be with us, we cannot hope to prosper. We may boast of our wide expanse of empire; our influence with foreign states; the unexampled success of our commerce; and the power of our arms; but if we build on no other foundation than these, our national boasting will soon be changed to woe, and we, like the Jews of old, may be made a bye-word, and a hissing, an astonishment, and a name. It is to the faithfulness

of our Christian profession, that we must look for support—*that* is the wealth, “the true riches,” on which we should set great store : this will indeed be “*our wisdom and our understanding*”—the true source of our praise from other nations, who, viewing us from afar, shall say, “*Truly this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law?*”

It cannot be necessary at this time, and before this congregation, to expatiate on the debt of gratitude which we owe to that pure and truly Christian form of religion, under which it is our privilege to live. Let us remember, that if we would retain the blessings we enjoy, and transmit to our posterity unimpaired those religious principles which were handed down to us from our forefathers, we must be careful, lest, by an indolent security, or a blind confidence, we allow the foundations of our faith to be undermined, or our sanctuary to be exposed to the attacks of of the infidel and the scorner. Let it never be forgotten that “Righteousness exalteth a nation, but that sin is a reproach to any people*.” And as the Israelites were commanded to keep the statutes and observe the laws delivered to them by Moses, and as the early converts to Christianity were enjoined to “keep the decrees that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem†,” we too, like them, should strive to continue firmly established in that faith which was once delivered unto the saints, and

* Prov. xiv. 34.

† Acts xvi. 4, 5.

has descended in a pure and apostolical form to the present day—we should, in the words of the Psalmist, “Walk about (our) Zion, and go round about her, and tell the towers thereof”—we should “Mark well her bulwarks, and consider her palaces, that we may tell it to the generation following. For this God is our God for ever and ever, He will be our guide, even unto death*.” And if we are asked what are those boasted privileges—what those peculiar advantages on which we place such value,—we point at once to our Bible as the source of all our blessings: the foundation of all our hopes. We point to that pure and undefiled religion which is drawn from those holy pages—to the truly Scriptural character of our creeds, and the purity of our ordinances. We refer to our articles, and homilies, and, still more, to that beautiful liturgy which, while it supplies a form of prayer at once so spiritual and so practical, putting into our mouths, almost in the very language of the Bible, thoughts the most devout, and supplications the most comprehensive, at the same time preserves our congregations from the danger of being led, by the extemporaneous effusions of their minister, to forget the apostolic injunction of praying not only “with the spirit, but with the understanding also.” We refer, too, to the blessedness which our Church feels in being able to trace up immediately to the Apostolic age the divine authority of her Ministry; and the comfort which her children derive from the assurance that those who are set over them, are set over them in the Lord; and, therefore,

* Psalm XLviii. 12.

not for their own, but for their office sake, they esteem them very highly in love, and attend to their ministrations with confidence.

But while we boast of these and other privileges of our Church and nation, and are ready to express our thankfulness to God that we have been born in this Christian land, and in an age of so much religious freedom, let us not forget that the greater our national privileges may be, the greater becomes our individual responsibility. For while we read the records of God's judgments on the Israelites, and recall to our minds the vengeance which followed their disobedience to His commands—when we remember that almost in exact proportion to their obedience was their national prosperity—when we see the chosen people of God sent into captivity, their temple destroyed, the glory of their name defiled, and Jerusalem itself a heap of ruins,—and “when many nations shall pass by this city,” and the question is asked, “every man of his neighbour, wherefore hath the Lord done thus to this great city?” we read the answer in the words of the prophet, “Because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord their God*.”—When, I say, we reflect on all this, and watch each fatal step which they took in the downward path of destruction, let us look to this history not as a dry and profitless tale of by-gone days, but remember that that “these things are written for our example,” and for our warning ; therefore “let him that thinketh he standeth take heed, lest he fall;”—for if God spared

* Jer. xxii. 8, 9.

not His own, His chosen people, but gave them up to destruction, because they kept not His covenant, nor obeyed His laws, how shall we hope to escape, if, with so much greater blessings vouchsafed to us, “we neglect so great salvation?” “For if he that despised Moses’ law died without mercy, of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith He was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of Grace*?” And if, brethren, we believe that now, as in the days of the Israelites, our national prosperity depends upon our national religion, how ought this belief to awaken in us all—in every child of our common mother Church, an anxious desire to walk in all her ways, and observe all her ordinances? ought we not to “stand in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein,” trusting to the promise that we “shall find rest to our souls †?” For as nations are composed of individuals collected together, and (as they ought to be) united in the holy bands of faith and love: having one Lord, one hope, and looking for one great reward—and, as we know, that “if one of our bodily members suffers, all the members suffer with it,” we should be peculiarly careful in our respective stations, lest by our own unworthiness, our negligence, or our sins, we add our portion to the accumulated load of our country’s guilt, and so take part in her destruction.

* Heb. x. 28, 29.

† Jer. vi. 16.

And if this be the plain duty of all, how much more awful is our responsibility, as the appointed Ministers and Pastors of the flock of Christ! For to us it belongs, not only personally to observe and to keep the commandments of the Lord our God, and to walk in the way of His laws, but also, by our example as well as by our precept, "so to let our light shine" before the people committed to our charge, that we be better able to guide back the sheep going astray to the fold of the great Shepherd. And woe, woe to us, if we be traitors to our Lord! woe to us, if, having solemnly and irrevocably taken upon us the high commission with which we are invested, and undertaken, by God's help, faithfully to observe the precepts, and to deliver the message of the Gospel;—woe to us, I say, if we arrest the advance of the returning penitent, or fail to feed him when rescued and returned; or, if in any case, by our want of personal holiness, or by a perversion of God's word, we make shipwreck of the souls of those whose eternal interests are intrusted to our charge! "Necessity is laid upon us; yea, woe is unto us if we preach not the Gospel:" or, if we do preach it, make all our preaching vain by the carelessness or wickedness of our own lives.

How difficult, how trying is our position! We are exposed to the temptations of the world, its allurements, and its trials, like other men—we are *in* the world, though we should not be *of* the world—we are not driven back into the cloister, nor shut up in the hermit's cell, but we are set, as it were, upon a hill,

in the sight of all our people;—we must, therefore, as we have solemnly promised at our ordination, “diligently apply ourselves, the Lord being our helper, to frame and fashion our own selves, and our families, according to the doctrines of Christ; and to make both ourselves and them, as much as in us lieth, wholesome examples and patterns to the flock of Christ*.” In a word, we must remember that we are stewards, and must one day give an account of our stewardship. As we value our own souls, then, as well as the souls of those who look up to us for guidance and instruction in righteousness, let us take heed to ourselves, to our example, and “to our doctrine, for in so doing we shall both save ourselves and them that hear us.” And deeply as it imports all men, faithfully to observe the ordinances, and to believe the truths of that holy religion of which they are the professed followers, how much more does it behove us to be careful to “teach, to admonish, to feed, and to provide for the Lord’s family—to seek for Christ’s sheep that are dispersed abroad, that they may be saved through Christ for ever†.” “Holding fast the faithful word, as we have been taught, that we may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers‡.”

But I must hasten onward, to consider one other point, to which our text directs our attention, and which I should be unwilling to omit, on an occasion like the present.

* Ordination Service.

† Ibid.

‡ Titus i. 9.

The Israelites were exhorted to keep the commandments of the Lord their God, to show by their devoted attachment to those precepts, and by their unflinching adherence to those principles, that they were willing to strive, at least, to prove themselves obedient to the will of God. They were not only to “bind them for a sign upon their hands, to write them upon the posts of their house, and on their gates*,” but they were also to “teach them diligently to their children;” they were, in the language of our text, to “*beware, lest they depart from their heart all the days of their lives; but teach them their sons, and their sons’ sons.*”

And *how* are we to do this? I appeal to all—to the laity more particularly,—*how* are we to teach, to educate our children? Would you wish to offer them the meagre food of cold morality? Would you wish that they who are dear to you as your own souls, should be nurtured and brought up in everything that is lovely, everything that is of good report, (so far, at least, as mere moral motives are concerned,) and debar them from that most precious food, that only adequate and satisfying nourishment, “the nurture and admonition of the Lord?” If we are told that wisdom is indeed the principal thing; if, with all our getting, we are to get understanding; and if you believe that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,” I entreat you to examine well the foundation of all education, and see that it be based on that one only

* Deut. vi. 8, 9.

safe rock, THE WORD OF GOD. As citizens of a Christian land, as Christian parents, and heads of Christian families, I entreat you to be satisfied with no system of education, however plausible, no method of instruction, however specious, that is not founded on Christian principles, and strengthened by religious discipline. Look well to the groundwork of that training of the mind which is offered to your notice; and see that while it professes to teach the wisdom of this world, it neglects not that wisdom which is from above. If you find that education is not based on Christian motives and Christian doctrines, but proceeds on views entirely apart from all religious considerations, beware how you "*teach to your sons, and your sons' sons,*" that by which you cannot hope to advance their best interests, in the day of final account!

For ourselves, my reverend brethren, our duty cannot be doubtful. However others may choose to reject, or to explain away any portions of God's word, that may be offensive to their natural pride, or too openly at variance with their practice, we dare not, if we would, do less than enforce the *whole* counsel of God. Not that we love peace less, but that we love truth more. We must not compromise those blessed privileges which we enjoy; nor keep back from those who seek to be taught of us, those holy principles, which we believe to be essential to the salvation of their immortal souls. We do not assume to ourselves the sole custody of the key of knowledge; nor claim the exclusive superintendence of education; so that

no learning, if not taught by ourselves, be allowed throughout the land; but this privilege we do claim, this right we do assert, that we be not obstructed in teaching the blessed truths of the Gospel, to all who follow our ministrations;—that we be permitted fully, freely, and unreservedly to engraft the great truths of religion on every branch of education committed to our care;—that we offer to the rising generation, without impediment, and without control, that careful instruction in the true faith, prescribed by the Holy Scriptures, which alone “can make them wise unto salvation,” that we may be permitted (nay, *encouraged*) to extend the hand, and supply the need of all who come to us thirsting after spiritual knowledge, and to lead them through those paths, which we firmly believe to be the paths of truth, towards that heavenly kingdom which is promised to all the faithful servants of Christ Jesus. We have once solemnly promised, and by God’s grace, we will endeavour to keep that promise, “out of the Holy Scriptures to instruct the people committed to our charge*,” and it is our bounden duty to stand forward, and to point the way to those who, uniting their efforts in the same holy cause, are ready to assist in pouring forth, in more plentiful supply, those waters of life which alone can avail to the saving of the soul. And this we are ready to do, not exalting ourselves, when we magnify our office; nor measuring the end by the weakness of the means, when we stand up in God’s name to preach “Christ crucified;” and strive to win over to the

* Ordination Service.

paths of peace, those who would otherwise be left to stray unheeded in the wilderness of sin. And this can only be hoped for by making the Bible the groundwork of all instruction. Religion must be interwoven in the whole system of education. If good moral training is to be attained, and the children (of the poor especially) are to be rescued from ignorance and its attendants misery and vice, education can only be made efficient by preparing the heart, and sowing within it the seeds of divine truth, which, in due time, if tended by prayer, and watered by the dews of the Holy Spirit, may bring forth fruit unto perfection. And if it be asserted that we may leave out some of those truths, to obviate the objections of those who conscientiously differ from our faith; or forbear to enforce some less important doctrines, with a view to the introduction of some general and comprehensive scheme of education; we answer that nothing can be unimportant which is revealed to us in the Bible:—that nothing written in the word of God can safely be disregarded; nay, more, we feel bound to assert our honest conviction, that by giving up any part of our faith, we endanger the whole;—and that by endeavouring to satisfy the religious scruples of all, by conceding, one by one, the most essential tenets of our faith, and discarding the very elements of our religion, (for to satisfy all objections, we must be content to dispense with our Liturgy, our Sacraments, our Articles, and even the very Gospel of Christ itself,) we shall at length find, that, in the vain attempt to accommodate all creeds, we shall have sacrificed

all principles ; and instead of “ teaching our sons, and our sons’ sons,” that holy religion, which it has been our privilege to receive from our forefathers, we shall leave them only to be nurtured in a dry system of morality, without religion, a mere form of godliness, deprived of its life, its spirit, and its power.

Instead of thus lowering the standard of our national education, let more extended means be afforded for the spreading of our pure faith, and instructing all classes of our countrymen in the religion of their fathers. Let it be no longer a well-founded complaint, that the means and opportunities for divine worship are totally inadequate to meet the wants of the rapidly-increasing population ; and that thousands are shut out from our ministrations by want of accommodation. Let schools be multiplied and thrown open for the education of the poor, in the sacred principles of our Church. Let the Bible, in all its completeness, be made the groundwork of all our teaching ; and though we may not ourselves see the happy result, let us await it in faith, with patience ; and “ be not weary in well doing ;” for surely we may have full trust in Him, without whom all our efforts are vain, that “ in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”

What then remains for us, brethren, beloved in the Lord, but to unite in prayer to the great Head of our Church to strengthen the hands and to establish the hearts of His Ministers, that we, steadfastly keeping that holy faith which has been committed to our trust, may, by His grace, “ have utterance given unto us, that we may open our mouths boldly, to make known

the mystery of the Gospel*.” Let us pray that “His word spoken by us may have such abundant success, that it may never be spoken in vain,” and “that in all our words and deeds we may seek His glory, and the increase of His kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

* Ordination Service.

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